

Place and Leadership :

Promoting 'Delivering Better Places' and the URC case studies to the Cross Party Group on Architecture



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^ 'Delivering Better Places' Case Study 5 - IJburg Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The cross-party group of the Scottish Parliament on Architecture and the Built Environment were presented with the findings of 'Delivering Better Places' and the learning from the Urban Regeneration Companies (URC) case studies on February 22 2011. The purpose of the presentation was to explain why placemaking matters, not as an end in itself, but as a framework to deliver better lives for people.

The presentation was opened by Steven Tolson of RICS, one of the partners in developing Delivering Better Places with the Scottish Centre for Regeneration and A+DS. Steven highlighted the need to build on Scotland's talent in masterplanning and design to the delivery stage: we need more good examples of better places on the ground. The challenge is to carry through on ideas that matter to make better places that people want to be in. Professor David Adams of Glasgow University provided a précis of the 'Delivering Better Places' research. He emphasised the need for leadership, at strategic and local scales. He emphasised the need for leadership to define outcomes that deliver for people, to lead the process and to champion better delivery across political, financial and other cycles. Eugene Mullan presented learning from the work of the URC's in Scotland, demonstrating the 'six practicalities' of delivering on the policy imperatives set out in 'Designing Places'. Professor Trevor Davies drew the discussions together into three challenges for Scotland on people, process and money. Some key elements of these challenges relate to leadership, capacity building and skills and innovation in public funding.

The discussion that followed raised some important and useful challenges to the research, and to the community that do the placemaking. It is necessary, across the board, not just to illustrate how well process works, but what the placemaking processes generate. It is essential that we learn to explain how what we do affects people's lives in a meaningful way to a range of audiences in their language: political, policy, investment, service delivery and citizens. This relates to issues around quality of life: how do better places enable better opportunities for people, for prosperity? How do better places enable better delivery of services where there is greater emphasis on preventative rather than reactive delivery? How do better places enable us to use the resources we have [funding, capacities, organisation], with the assets we have [land, buildings, infrastructure] to achieve policy objectives on one hand, and the things that people articulate are important to them on the other?

A big challenge, one emphasised at the discussion, is to show how a better placemaking culture can help existing places, and make better new ordinary places, not just in terms of architecture, but crucially in terms of outcomes. People are critical, in both helping to shape clarity on the issues that matter, and in the decision making to deliver on these issues.

The placemaking discussion is not new. For many, the type of discussion that followed from the presentations is the same kind of discussion that has been going on now for over a decade. A criticism that often emerges at these events is that the people present are all the people who 'buy in' to the idea anyway: there is always a refrain about 'preaching to the converted'. In any field of practice, it is important both to reflect on what it is being done, and how effectively the community that practice are

practicing. This is legitimate and necessary. Drawing other people into the discussion is also necessary. This is a collective responsibility, and one which necessitates us to articulate the value of what we offer in terms of how it can enable better lives in all contexts, from the successful urban and rural places, to places where poverty of opportunity is still a reality. This is not a discussion about buildings. It is not a discussion about infrastructure. They are enablers of something more significant. The discussion is about outcomes. Within this a key issue relates to purpose: what is the purpose of the places we are trying to create or renew?

In 1973, Ian Adams in 'The Making of Urban Scotland' said that if 'Scotland wants to re-establish her priorities....she should look no further than the living condition of her ordinary people'. The emphasis on the ordinary is the key point, the ordinary and everyday opportunities that makes living possible. Better places matter because they do link quality of life, quality of service and quality of environment. They are about making markets, building prosperity and life chances. They are about process, they are about leadership. Fundamentally, they are a vehicle to bring together all the bits that form our lives and deliver them in a way that gives people better opportunities.

At the Cross Party Group meeting, there was both acknowledgement and a strengthening of the key messages from the research pieces, and some challenges to move the debate to the next level. In this context, A+DS propose to work with all partners to help deliver better places. We said at the meeting that we would specifically work on the following areas:

- Testing the principles of Delivering Better Places against existing places: how can we use the principles in this research to inform decisions about the better use of what we already have?
- Develop a programme of activity around leadership: this is about people and process; political, process and practitioner. Place is a public good. We all have a responsibility in leading better outcomes.
- Engaging people and communities in genuine approaches to shaping decisionmaking about places;
- Engaging with a range of actors who shape and use places; this includes service providers, volume builders, investors, and citizens. The cynics and sceptics to the placemaking agenda are as important a constituent group as the converted
- Challenging processes and models that act as a barrier to achieving better outcomes: process should be there to help deliver better outcomes. The integrity and integration of processes, and the culture that underpins how processes are used is critical to the delivery process.

If delivering better places matters, then it is not something that is owned by or the responsibility of any one agency or group. A+DS are committed to this agenda. We are also committed to meeting it through participation in the stories that affect peoples lives, collaboration in making change happen and pragmatism in delivering sustainable effects.



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